

HABS
DC,
WASH,
390-

American University, The College of History
(Hurst Hall)
Massachusetts and Nebraska Avenues at Ward
Circle
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-399

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS
DC,
WASH,
390-

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

THE COLLEGE OF HISTORY (HURST HALL)

HABS No. DC-399

Location: Massachusetts and Nebraska Avenues at Ward Circle and on The American University campus in northwest Washington, D.C.

Present Owner and Occupant: The American University

Use: While it no longer houses the department of history, it does house various classrooms, laboratories and offices.

Significance: Designed by Van Brunt & Howe during the 1890s, this classical "neo-Grec" structure was intended to be the first among many buildings for The National University, a concept originally conceived by George Washington during the 1700s. Unlike most 19th century collegiate edifices, it is not Gothic nor does it reflect any aspect of Romantic architecture, but is Classical in every detail. This fact relates it to the current of revived neo-classicism so pervasive during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In terms of Washington, D.C.'s architectural history, its plans and erection prefigure the McMillan Plan, a scheme to restore and rejuvenate Pierre L'Enfant's design for the nation's capital.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** The College of History was conceived by Henry Van Brunt and his partner Frank Howe during the mid-1890s. Its classical form grew out of his earlier plans for a Romanesque library. On March 9,

1896 the official ground breaking ceremony took place. Construction commenced in June 1896 even before a comprehensive scheme for the campus was agreed upon. On October 21, 1896 the corner stone of the College of History was laid with the gavel George Washington used to lay the cornerstone of The Capitol. This gavel had been used only four times for national occasions. The fact that it was ceremonially utilized at The American University testifies to the attitude government officials had toward this enterprise. Though the edifice was probably completed by December 1897 or January 1898, its keys were formally handed over from the construction company to the University on February 1, 1898. This date marks its official completion.

(Early History Files and the Courier, The American University Archives)

2. Architect: Henry Van Brunt, senior partner of Van Brunt & Howe, architects, Boston and Kansas City (with Frank Howe)

As a partner in two major architectural firms, Van Brunt achieved a national reputation and was among the most important architects of his day. Testifying to his prominence is the fact that he was invited to participate at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. A respected writer, his articles and papers on the fair were greatly admired and became quite influential.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts on September 5, 1832, Van Brunt received his education in Boston at the Boston

Latin School and Harvard University. After graduating from Harvard in 1854, he became the student of Boston architect George Snells. In 1856 he ventured to New York City where he joined the atelier of the renown Richard Morris Hunt. Several years later, Van Brunt's architectural career was interrupted when he served the Union in the Civil War. Resuming his practice, he formed a partnership, Ware & Van Brunt, with Robert Ware in 1863. The firm was highly regarded and received many notable commissions. After the retirement of Ware, the senior partner, in 1881, Van Brunt established a partnership with Frank Howe in 1883. Howe had been in the employ of Ware & Van Brunt since 1868.

Van Brunt & Howe emerged as a nationally acclaimed architectural firm. Though originally Boston based, it is probably best remembered for its work in the American west.

The last half of the 19th century, especially those years following the Civil War, was a time of westward expansion. The railroad was rapidly developing and with it a demand for railroad stations. Van Brunt & Howe was commissioned to plan many railroad stations in the west by Charles Francis Adams, president of Union Pacific and a friend of Van Brunt. By 1885, Van Brunt & Howe opened an office in Kansas City, a move which enabled it to become the most important west of Chicago. In fact, it was one of the few firms of significance with offices west of the Mississippi River. Epitomizing its status is the fact that the firm was invited to participate in The World's Columbian Exposi-

tion where it was responsible for the designs of the Electricity Building, the Hygeia Cooling Plant and the Wyoming Building.

Van Brunt's architectural creations can not be divorced from their time for they reflect the current of eclecticism. Throughout most of his career, Van Brunt gravitated toward what is usually called the "Ruskin-inspired Gothic." His earliest ideas for The College of History reveal his interest in the Romantic, but this time in the Richardsonian Romanesque. His work at the fair and The College of History testify to his facility in the Classical style.

Complying with the advice of Mr. Frederick H. Rindge, a wealthy California Methodist who promised to partially finance the University's enterprise, the University employed the service of Van Brunt & Howe in 1893. Still involved with the fair, Van Brunt & Howe enthusiastically welcomed The American University's proffer. Van Brunt & Howe was to co-operate with the landscape architectural firm of Olmsted Associates already in the school's employ. Olmsted Associates played a major role at The World's Columbian Exposition by selecting its site and designing its comprehensive scheme. The two firms were to collaborate in much the same way they had at the exposition with the Olmsteds designing the overall campus and determining locations of the proposed buildings and Van Brunt & Howe planning the individual edifices. Van Brunt & Howe looked forward to this association, citing its successful collaboration with the

Olmsteds at the fair.

Beyond his status as a great 19th century architect, writer, senior partner in a firm reputed to be the most important west of Chicago and a prominent participant at The World's Fair, Van Brunt was one of the first members of The American Institute of Architects. He served as the organization's secretary in 1864 and its president in 1899, almost immediately after his association with The American University and the completion of his College of History.

3. Original and subsequent owners: By January 1889 John F. Hurst found a suitable property in northwest Washington, D.C. to house his Methodist University. At the head of Massachusetts Avenue extended, some three miles from The White House, this site was approximately 91 acres of farmland known as the Davis Tract, a term derived from the previous owner's name. Its two subdivisions were called "Saints Philip and Jacob" and "Friendship." On January 25, 1890, an option of \$1,000 was paid on the purchase price of \$100,000. On February 28, 1890, Hurst paid the first installment of \$20,000 and received the title transfer from the owner, Ashsah C. Davis and her representative, John W. Waggaman. (Deed of Transfer may be found in The American University Archives, Early History File, Box 1, Folder 1)

At the time Hurst procured the property only a farm house stood on the site. Legend has it that George Washington once visited that farm house.

Based on a comprehensive campus design executed by Olmsted Associates in the early 1890s, The College of History was assigned a plot on the site. Ever since its erection in 1897-98, it has been the property of The American University. (Early History File, The American University Archives)

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The Superintendent of Building and Grounds for The College of History was John Brooks Hammond who served the University from 1896 to 1916. John P. Parsons served as its Contractor and Washington architect W.H. Poindexter was responsible for overseeing construction. Poindexter, a well known architect who designed many domestic and some institutional buildings in Washington, D.C., competed for The American University commission in 1895. While the University admired both Poindexter's and Van Brunt & Howe's plans, Van Brunt & Howe won the competition. Based in Kansas City and Boston, Van Brunt and Howe could not oversee all construction of The College of History so the University hired Poindexter to supervise building and to make sure Van Brunt & Howe's plans were interpreted correctly. Letters from that period indicate that there was a great deal of friction between Poindexter and Van Brunt & Howe. Their association was all but successful and congenial. According to van Brunt, Poindexter attempted to alter his firm's plans and substitute his own. Van Brunt contended Poindexter was misrepresenting Van Brunt & Howe's drawings when he presented them to the University officials. For such offenses, Van Brunt called Poindexter before the AIA

Board of Ethics, but later withdrew his charges believing Poindexter would remedy the situation with an apology. After The College of History was erected, Van Brunt & Howe resigned still hoping the University would terminate its relationship with Poindexter and rehire it to continue work on The American University. Instead, the University commissioned another well known American architect, Henry Ives Cobb.

There is no indication that Poindexter successfully integrated his ideas and plans into The College of History. This structure does not resemble any of his buildings while it clearly resembles Van Brunt & Howe's earlier ideas and drawings for The College of History.

The College of History was the first structure of The American University. Interestingly enough, it was erected before a comprehensive campus plan was determined and fully agreed upon. In 1893 both Olmsted Associates and Van Brunt & Howe favored the Romanesque style and a more Romantic disposition of all buildings. Both preferred a unified plan with homogenous architecture. Like Olmsted, Van Brunt acknowledged the limitations of the site and realized that the hilly and irregularities farm land would require extensive grading and surfacing if a formal plan was employed. Van Brunt & Howe, however, did advocate a formal grouping of the first and most important structures which were originally intended to be the administration

building, chapel and library. All three were to be situated near the present traffic circle in the vicinity of The College of History. It was the University's founding fathers who insisted upon greater formality, calling Olmsted's early designs "accidental." Debate concerning the campus' design ensued. Olmsted reiterated that formality was impractical because it warranted extensive grading and terracing. Van Brunt & Howe believed most of the campus should be more picturesque with a Romantic arrangement of buildings, but the firm felt the entry area and its building arrangement should be symmetrical. Olmsted's plan of 1895 was transitional in that it moved toward greater formality. A quadrangle called The Court of Ceremony was planned near the circle and enclosed by the administration building, chapel, library and art building with The College of History next to the art building and library. Precise symmetry was utilized for the quadrangle, but the rest of the campus continued Olmsted's picturesque design.

Beyond a preference for formal order, an interest in the classical style surfaced. Though Van Brunt & Howe still espoused the Romanesque, they complied with the wishes of the University and rendered elevations in both the Romanesque and Classical styles. Their plans for a Romanesque library evolved into their Classical College of History. A comparison of their respective ground plans is valuable, revealing that for The College

of History the orientation was changed to emphasize lateral extensions in a decidedly Classical manner.

By 1896 Olmsted's park-like plan was completely discarded. Comparing his scheme of 1895 to the 1896 designs reveals that the landscape architects had succumbed (at) to the wishes of the University officials. Many plans were executed that year. In all of them, the entire campus was Classical in every respect. Instead of the rather modest Court of Ceremony, a name obviously derived from The World's Columbian Exposition's Court of Honor, long rectangular malls arranged in perfect symmetry dominated. In effect, The Court of Ceremony was now extended and made into a monumental vista lined with many imposing Classical edifices including The College of History. From this point on, The College of History was envisioned as the first structure of a long mall which intersected at right angles with another equally imposing formal mall.

Naturally, considerable thought was given to the main entrance. Like some of the earlier schemes, the entrance was often placed on the traffic circle. In others, the traffic circle was completely eliminated and the principle entrance situated on Massachusetts Avenue designated by a triangular wedge of open space punctuated with some shrubbery.

Despite Olmsted Associates' rational arguments and the lack of financial endowment, Hurst continued to envision a classical city overlooking Washington, D.C. With eloquence

and some pretension, they referred to their school as "The White City," a phrase one more readily associates with The Columbian World Exposition. Before the specific overall plan was completely agreed upon, construction of The College of History commenced. By early 1898 the edifice was erected and a classically conceived Neo-Grec structure stood on the high ground three miles from The White House at the head of Massachusetts Avenue extended and on what became the campus' only formal quadrangle, The Court of Ceremony.

Documents concerning the names of suppliers ⁵exit in The American University Archives, but these records are somewhat hard to follow. Most probably, the Columbian Quarries of Rutland, Vermont, served as the school's supplier of marble.

5. Original plan and construction: The original set of blueprints drawn by Van Brunt & Howe may not be in existence. The American University Archives is in possession of an early tracing belonging to Van Brunt & Howe. This tracing depicts the firm's ideas for a Romanesque style library, the structure which seems to have evolved into The College of History.

The University Archives also has several photographs documenting The College of History's construction and original appearance. Some reproductions of the firm's intentions for the structure's front facade of found in various issues of the Courier. These depictions reveal the kind of embellishment Van Brunt envisioned. For example, Classical gods

would have adorned the front pediment had finances permitted. The names of famous historians would have been carved on the band beneath the cornice and above the second row of windows had all the firm's ideas been carried out as originally planned. Early correspondence between Van Brunt & Howe and the University officials, as well as excerpts from the Courier reveal much about the intended and resulting appearance of the structure. Based on primary source material, including early photographs, it is fair to assume that the present College of History closely resembles its original plans and its original appearance.

The College of History is a solid, rectangular white marble edifice designed to house classrooms, lecture halls, professors' offices, a museum, a library and an assembly room. While there have been some alterations to the building's interior, its first and second floors still retain much of the character Van Brunt envisioned. Rendered in the Classical style, its exterior is well preserved with little alteration. While it would have been somewhat more elaborate than finances allowed, it was intended to be a sober, rather severe structure with a Doric mood.

6. Alterations and additions: Little remains documenting physical alterations and/or additions to The College of History. The United States Government began to use The College of History during the late teens. Several changes were made during this period. The government placed a slate roof over salvage of the original copper one in 1817. The next year, it laid a floor on the unfinished attic so the University could move its library books and supplies from its location on the first floor of The College of History to the attic. In 1929 minor alterations may have been necessary to accommodate a post office on The College of History's first floor. The basement was converted into special rooms for chemistry while the original library and museum on the building's first floor were changed into classrooms and laboratories. Examining the structure also reveals modernization like glass and metal front and side doors instead of the original oak ones. Modern conveniences have also been incorporated into the building. Overall, the structure is pretty well intact and in possession of much the same character it had in the 1890s.

(Early History Files, The American University Archives)

B. Historical Context:

The site on which The College of History now stands along with the area of the University has its own history. Legend has it that George Washington once stopped at the old farm house on his way back to Washington, D.C. Interestingly enough, Hurst and the other founders of the

University would continually look to the past for inspiration and always regarded George Washington as the spiritual founder of their enterprise. In their eyes, this particular site would have been that much more appropriate to house The National University because Washington himself had actually been there.

During the Civil War, Fort Gaines was established on this high ground as Washington's first protective fortification. Designed to protect Washington, D.C. from Southern advancements, it was inhabited by a garrison from Pennsylvania who threw up earthworks at the fortification's northern parts and emerged as one of the most important defense points of the war.

Unlike most campus buildings of the 19th century, Van Brunt's College of History was classical in every detail.

Throughout the 19th century the Romantic style dominated campus planning and architectural style. Memorial Hall, Harvard, also designed by Van Brunt exemplifies this. The University of Chicago is another good example testifying to the predominance of the romantic style in campus planning and architecture. College campuses were usually executed in the Gothic.

The College of History seems to be a departure from this well established tradition. Van Brunt's earliest conceptions for this edifice were Romantic, specifically Romanesque, and would have fit neatly into the mold of campus architecture and the current mood of the Richardsonian Romanesque. By the mid-1890s Van Brunt's Romanesque schemes for the University's buildings had given way to greater formality and the Classical style. Rendered in the neo-Grec style, The College of History stands out as a unique and daring architectural statement not relating to most campus structures but to the resurging classicism herald by The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 (The Chicago Fair).

Founded in Washington, D.C. during the early 1890s by the Methodist Bishop John Fletcher Hurst,

The American University was directly stimulated by the exposition. In fact, all its major architectural firms played a significant role there. These were Frederick Law Olmsted and Associates, Henry Van Brunt and his partner Frank Howe and Henry Ives Cobb.

At the fair, Van Brunt and Howe designed three important buildings; the Electricity Building, the Hygeia Cooling Plant and the Wyoming Building. All were classical in style.

The immediate effect of The World's Columbian Exposition, a comprehensive scheme of classically disposed monumental structures arranged in a formal manner around lagoons and waterways, upon the course of American architecture is well acknowledged and documented. (T.M. Karlowicz' dissertation, The Architecture of the World's Columbian Exposition, 1969 is probably the best and most comprehensive study of the fair and its architecture.) The exposition's classical style and formal grouping of buildings set a precedent. The concept of "The White City" was an instrumental force in the architectural development of The American University's early campus designs, The College of History being a prime example.

Though the classical style of The College of History was greatly stimulated by The World's Columbian Exposition, it was also inspired by early American

History, specifically George Washington's dream of a great national university in the nation's capital and Pierre L'Enfant's classical design for Washington, D.C. In Bishop Hurst's eyes The American University was the fulfillment of President George Washington's "National University." Hurst's "National University," however, would have been Methodist. The following is an excerpt from the University's Courier, dated 1892:

The thought of a National University at Washington, D.C. is older than the Republic. In October 1775, Major William Boddgett went to the headquarters of General Washington to complain of the ruinous state of the college (Harvard) from the conduct of the militia quartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts. General Green, being present, said to the company in consultation: "To make amends for these injuries after the war he hoped we would erect a National University at Washington." General Washington made reply with that inimitably expressive and truly interesting look for which he was sometimes so remarkable: "Young man, you are a prophet, inspired." General Washington gave the credit of the thought of building a university at the National Capital to Colonial

Byrd, of Virginia, who is believed to be the first man who suggested the Federal city as the place for a great university for America. During subsequent years of Washington's life he always put the idea of a great university at the Capital next to the federation of the States. His thought was that a Federal city and a National University would be two great influences for the purpose of strengthening the bond existing between the various State governments and the National. Through his influence a committee was sent to Europe to study and devise plans for a University. The detailed drawings as agreed upon are in the Congressional Library, and are worthy of study. We hope in some future number of the Courier to present them to our readers.

During Mr. Washington's presidency, in his communications to Congress he frequently made reference to his favorite idea. In his will he provided for it beneficently. He died at the age of 67, December 14, 1799, "leaving in his stocks equal to \$25,000 for his favorite National University and inviting subscribing followers and directing the interest to be invested at compound interest until

the fund that such subscriptions has invited
in his will may sufficient for the entire object.
(Courier, Volume I, Number I, September 1892, p. 10,
The American University Archives)

In 1895 Hurst purchased a facsimile of George Washington's letter on The National University. Hurst's hope to establish Washington's National University was responsible for the execution of comprehensive campus designs rendered in the Classical, as well as the eventual erection of The College of History in 1898.

Associating Classical architecture with the ancient republics of antiquity, George Washington and his architect Pierre L'Enfant favored the Classical style for the nation's capital. Thomas Jefferson, who also equated a Classical vocabulary with the republics of ancient Greece and Rome, selected the Classical style for The University of Virginia. With the same kind of logic, Hurst preferred the Classical for The American University and, therefore, The College of History. Originally, the names of Greek historians and sculpture of Greek gods were to adorn parts of the front facade. Hurst was inspired by L'Enfant's Classical Baroque design in which all principle boulevards radiate out from the heart of the city. Massachusetts Avenue, considered one of the most important and beautiful thoroughfares in Washington, D.C., was one of L'Enfant's major boulevards. Hurst and the other founders of the University hoped Massachusetts Avenue would

eventually extend to their hilly spot and, thus, connect "The National University" with the heart of the nation's capital. Eventually, legislation was passed securing the extension of Massachusetts Avenue specifically to The American University, as well as, The National Cathedral. The following is an excerpt from a bill that ^{*was before*} the House and Senate:

A Bill: for extension and improvement of Massachusetts Avenue and Boundary Avenues, Northwest,

Whereas the artistic development of the Capital City requires that the magnificent system of avenue radiating from the city's center be finished; and whereas, the extension of Washington's widest and finest residential avenue, Massachusetts Avenue, and of Boundary Avenue, contemplated by the construction of the now completed Massachusetts Avenue Bridge, will subserve several great public purposes, among which are the following:

The providing of a much needed thoroughfare of general travel; The development of the most attractive portion of the District of Columbia; The opening of the avenue approaches to the Naval Observatory, the Episcopal Cathedral Site and Schools, and

The American University Campusee;
(Early History File, The American University Archives)

Another bill (H.R. 19039) was introduced by Representative Smith of Michigan in 1910 and was approved by both Houses and the President that year. The following is the bill as worded in the Congreessional Record on February 17, 1910:

Be it enacted, et , That, under and in accordance with the provisions of subchapter 1 of chapter 15 of the Code of Law for the District of Columbia, the Commissioners of the District of Columbia be, and they are hereby, authorized and directed to institute in the supreme court of the District of Columbia a proceeding in rem to ondemn the land that may be necessary for the extension and widening of Massachusetts avenue NW. from Wisconsin avenue to the District line, with a width of 160 feet: Provided, however, That the entire amount found to be due and awarded by the jury in said proceeding as damages for and in respect of the land to be condemned for said extension plus the costs and expenses of the proceeding hereunder shall be assessed by the jury as benefits.

Sec. 2. That the Commissioners of the District of Columbia are herby authorized and directed to abandon that portion of ground east of Hamilton Circle lying between the south line of Massachusetts avenue NW., as heretofore dedicated, and the south line of

the said avenue as established by the plan of the permanent system of highways of the District of Columbia, and the said ground shall revert to the owners of the adjacent lots Nos. 1 to 8, inclusive, in square No. 1815, in accordance with their respective frontages.

Sec. 3. That there is hereby appropriated out of the revenues of the District of Columbia an amount sufficient to pay the necessary costs and expenses of the condemnation proceedings herein provided for and for the payment of the amounts awarded by the jury as damages, to be repaid to the District of Columbia from the ^Sassessments for benefits and covered into the Treasury to the credit of the revenues of the District of Columbia. (Congressional Record, House, February 17, 1910, page ^S2036-37)

While securing the passage of a bill authorizing a paved and modern road to the University took along time to achieve, it must be remembered that Washington, D.C. was a small town at the turn-of-the-century. At that time, Cleveland Park was being developed as a suburban, practically rural, retreat for city dwellers. ^SThe National Cathedral, like The American University, had only been begun. In effect, the campus of The American University was located far from Washington, D.C. proper in a rural environment. During the first decade of the 20th century much was happening in the way of road construction. The

extension of Massachusetts Avenue to Wisconsin Avenue and then to The American University fit neatly into this fervor of activity. Several Senators and Representatives served as trustees of the University and had been responsible for introducing and endorsing bills requesting Massachusetts Avenue's extension to The American University.

Though petitioning for the road's extension had begun as early as 1891 and passage of a bill authorizing its extension to The American University had been passed in 1910, Massachusetts Avenue as a finished and paved thoroughfare did not reach the University's campus until 1912. By 1908, however, Massachusetts Avenue did extend to the University, but probably in a less finished condition. It is fair to assume that this very important event in the life of the University would have been enacted many years earlier had the school's most powerful supporters such as President William McKinley, Senator James McMillan and John Hurst himself had lived longer.

Hurst's choice of acreage at the head of Massachusetts Avenue extended may initially seem somewhat impractical, but it did fit neatly into the comprehensive plan of Washington, D.C. It^S eventual location on a traffic circle further demonstrates this. In L'Enfant's scheme, significant intersections and places were situated on rond point or circles. A traffic circle would articulate the importance of the school and would have been the logical conclusion to a grand boulevard that culminated in the "National University."

Hurst's Protestant University would thus be physically and psychologically part of L'Enfant's grand scheme.

Today, The American University is on Ward Circle.

The eventual completion of Massachusetts Avenue to the University complied with the goals of the McMillan Commission which stressed the importance of restoring and continuing L'Enfant's scheme. Massachusetts' extension (or completion) was part of the McMillan Plan. Interestingly, Senator James McMillan who was the prime initiator of the commission had been associated with The American University in 1891. McMillan would have been well aware of the University's predilection for L'Enfant's plan and the nation's capital's roots in Classicism. The University's fidelity to early American dreams predates that of the McMillan Commission by a decade.

The University was envisioned as the fulfillment of George Washington's dream of a great national university in the nation's capital. For this reason, deliberation was taken not only in the selection of architects, but in incorporators. Originally 13 prominent Americans were asked to serve as the incorporators; the number 13 being deliberately chosen for its symbolic association with the first 13 states. In effect, Hurst and the other founders saw themselves as continuing and advancing what had been so dear to those who had established the American nation itself: the creation of The National University. This aspiration would play a great role in the selection of an appropriate architectural style for The College of History and the other proposed

structures of the University. Beyond the original 13, ^{names} ~~were added~~ to the list of incorporators. James McMillan and Robert Pattison, Governor of Pennsylvania, were among them.

Admired by both Democrats and Republicans, McMillan entered Michigan politics in the 1880s and later served as a Republican Senator from 1889 to his death in 1902. It was on May 28, 1891 that his name appears on The American University Certificate of Incorporation from The District of Columbia. (Early History Files, The American University Archives)

This means he became associated with the University only two years after his election to the Senate and well knew of the goals and aspirations of Hurst since the University's inception - during those crucial years of its beginnings. However, McMillan later declined the formal position as an incorporator and wrote the following to the University on September 23, 1891:

I have given the matter consideration and have decided that as a member of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia it will not be best for me to appear as one of the incorporators of the American University.

McMillan obviously felt an official association with one of the city's universities might be a conflict of interest with his duties on the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia. This does not mean he lost interest in Hurst's endeavor. In fact, the following excerpt from another letter written by

McMillan indicatee the oppoeite:

....and (I) am pleased to know that the Bishop and others interested in the American University are gratified at what little I was able to do toward the extension of Massachueetts Avenue.

Though McMillan did not personally introduce bills to continue Massachueetts Avenue to The American University, he apparently strongly lobbied for the cauee. Interestingly, this letter reveals McMillan's interest in extending one of L'Enfant's major thoroughfare^S even before his creation of the McMillan Commission, which became the Park and Planning Commiesion.

Before Maseachusetts Avenue could reach The American University, a bridge had to be built over Rock Creek and the Parkway. Both the Senate and Congress eventually paesed bille authorizing such a program. Senate Bill S. 4459 and Congressional Bill H.R. 12256 dealt with this specific endeavor. un December 2, 1890 the bills met with general approval. One of the individuals who sponsored the bill was Mr. Faulkner, who was also involved with The American Univeresity. By 1898 a bridge croesed the creek and parkway, extending Maseachusetts that much cloeer to Hurst'e "National Univeresity."

Another important official eupporting the University was Senator L.E. McComas of Maryland who served as a Trustee of The American University from 1892 until his death in 1907.

While McComas was a staunch advocate of the project, he had some reservations about the relationship between the University and Congress and seemed to be somewhat disheartened about a National University's dependence upon the Federal Government. McComas wrote the following to officials of The American University:

I look with distrust upon a National University coddled by Congress. The Columbian University, the Catholic University and the Episcopal Schools all succeed at the National Capital. Surely the American University will....
You must always count on me as the constant friend and advocate of the great university you have founded on such a broad basis.
Your foundation will be sufficiently non-sectarian to satisfy the liberalism of coming centuries.

Despite his obvious reservations, McComas continued to support the University and introduced legislation that would help it.

Perhaps the most important of all the University's advocates was President William McKinley who became a trustee of the University in 1899. McKinley whole-heartedly endorsed the project. Soon after he became a trustee, his Vice-President, Theodore Roosevelt became a trustee of The American university. With regard to chronology, McKinley and Roosevelt became affiliated with Hurst's enterprise after Van Brunt's resignation and the completion of The College of History.

It is the ideas emerging at The American University during the early to mid-1890s that are so important. The fact so many prominent political persons were associated with the enterprise is also significant. Hurst's dream to establish George Washington's great national university, despite the fact that Hurst's school would be affiliated with a particular religious denomination, was accepted and supported by many. It must be remembered that this was the age of The Great White Fleet. The ideas surfacing at The American University and its quest to establish the "National University" reflected resurging preoccupation with nationalism and revived protestantism. Their University was intended to fit into the physical - and, thus, - psychological plan of Washington, D.C. They did achieve this. The American University stands at the head of Massachusetts Avenue on Ward Circle. If one follows this dignified thoroughfare toward the city proper, one would be led to the heart of the nation's capital. Of special interest is the creation of Union Station on Massachusetts Avenue near the Capitol. Built in 1907, it was meant to be the gateway to the city. Considering its location, it may also be viewed as the gateway to the "National University." One wonders if this could have been a deliberate gesture on the part of the McMillan Commission because it seems too well planned to be otherwise.

As the first building erected, The College of History was the beginning of a lofty dream's materialization. Though it is but a vague reflection of a monumental classical

scheme for an entire university complex, The College of History represents not only a concern for Classical architecture but concrete devotion to comprehensive Classical designs for campuses. Had the overall plans been realized, The American University may have been the first Classically conceived campus - in design and style - ^(c)since Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Virginia. Bishop Hurst and the other University trustees and officials greatly admired Jefferson and began to see their enterprise as a contemporary University of Virginia.

By early 1898 The College of History was completed and a Classically conceived Neo-Grec structure then dominated the high ground three miles from The White House. Its visibility was a feature the University officials greatly valued. They noted that from its heights one could see all the city below including the Capitol, the Library of Congress and the Washington Monument. Looming above turn-of-the-century Washington, The College of History was the first structure of what its supporters pretentiously referred to as "The White City," a title obviously derived from the Chicago Fair. Referring to The American University, the Courier stated "The White City set upon a hill cannot be hid." (Courier, March 1909, The American University Archives) The following passages also from the Courier reveal the University's conscious concern for a style of architecture that neatly fit into the scheme of the city. They also epitomize the association between architecture philosophy.

....argent crown of a metropolis turning to silvery marble. Washington has been growing whiter for 20 years - Library of Congress, Naval Observatory, Riggs National Bank, American Security and Trust Company, the Evening Star, DAR, Union Station, Masonic Temple.
(Courier, March 1909)

....shall this outward whitening, a spreading splendor in our Capital City, prove to be, in the years to follow, only the material sign of moral leprosy, or shall it become the effective symbol of a growing purity in private life and in public affairs?
(Courier, March 1909)

Though modest in size and character compared to Washington's other Classical edifices such as the Capitol and the Library of Congress, The College of History was greatly admired by Washingtonians and the national press. At its completion, it was compared to the recently erected Library of Congress. While some sculptural detailing was deliberately eliminated for financial reasons, the structure was intended to be simple and sober with clearly defined forms. This laterally extended equal weighted rectangle is absolutely symmetrical with a large central portico dominating its front facade. Serving as the building's main entrance, the portico faces the University's quadrangle called The Court of Ceremony, a name obviously derived from The Columbian Exposition's Court of Honor.

Of great importance is The United States Government's use of The College of History during World War I and after. While classes began in 1914 at The College of History so did the government's use of the facilities. On May 27, 1914, the University's trustees approved the Executive Committee's arrangements with the U.S. Weather Bureau. The roof and one room of the edifice were to be used for the investigation and study of solar radiation. Just three years later on May 31, 1917, the University officials unanimously approved the president of The United States request to borrow the University's grounds and buildings. The facilities were then utilized by the army with its Sixth Regiment of U.S. Engineers occupying five of the building's rooms. These rooms were used as sleeping quarters and offices for the officers. By October of 1917, the University had vacated most of The College of History. By December, most of The College of History and all of The McKinley-Ohio Hall of Government were being used by the U.S. Government.

It was reported that the civil engineers occupied 17 rooms in The College of History by January 1918. While the Interior Department was utilizing The McKinley-Ohio Hall of Government. To accommodate more chemists, the University's library (which was on the first floor of The College of History) was moved to the attic of The College of History. The government layered the unfinished floor of the attic for the library. By July 1918 the Bureau of Mines wanted more space in The College of History. They also sought permission to build

on The Court of Ceremony. Clearly those years around World War I were dominated by the U.S. Government's need for additional space for both personnel and experiments.

In July 1919, the Interior Department and War Department except for the Nitrate Air and Bureau of Mines divisions vacated the grounds of The American University. On November 20, 1925, the University again opened. Much of the building was used by the University for academic purposes. During World War II, however, it was occupied by the American Red Cross and U.S. Armed Forces Institute. By 1953 administrative offices, classrooms and laboratories dominated the spaces within the edifice. In 1960 the basement level was devoted to chemistry, while the first floor was used by the biology department and the third floor by the psychology division. The College of History was now dedicated to the sciences.

The American University and its facilities played an important role in the development of chemical warfare and other scientific experiments. Many of the nation's brightest minds were said to have gathered there to work and experiment.

In 1925 the structure's name was changed to Hurst College of History and then in 1932, it was changed to Hurst Hall which is its present name. The College of History's name was so altered as a means of honoring the man responsible for the university's creation - John F. Hurst.

Prepared by: Karin M.E. Alexis, Art and Architectural Historian;
Teacher, Northern Virginia Community College and
Southeastern University;
Doctoral Student, The University of Virginia;
1981

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The College of History, a sturdy rectangular cream white marble edifice rendered in the Classical style, was erected in 1897-98. A laterally extended building punctuated by a large pediment over a central portico, The College of History possesses an uncompromising symmetry with two equal weighted wings. The overall mood of the edifice's exterior is that of a Neo-Classical temple, recalling some of Jefferson's work. Compared to the Library of Congress and the U.S. Capitol, its character is austere. Yet, it possesses a sobriety, a dignity and a temperance that give it a quiet but forceful strength. Its solidity and obvious durability are not disguised or hidden by prettified, lacey Classical ornamentation. Instead, they enhance the mood of Doric restraint, complementing the serious, elegant yet functional character of Van Brunt's College of History. Construction itself cost \$158,000. Including the architects' services, the building came to \$175,000. The original structure is in a very good state of repair and is largely intact with no major external alterations and some internal ones.
2. Condition of the fabric: very good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The College of History is located on The American University campus with its front facade facing The Court of Ceremony and its back Nebraska Avenue. The entire structure which runs parallel to the lateral extensions of The Court of Ceremony and Nebraska Avenue is ruled by strict symmetry and geometry, possessing two mirrored halves. This two story edifice with attic (now finished and in use) and basement (also finished and used for classrooms, offices and laboratories) is 176 feet long and 70 feet wide at its wings and 90 feet wide at its center. The central area culminates with a portico supported by colossal, two-story high Ionic columns on its front and extends about 20 feet beyond the wings toward Nebraska Avenue in its rear, permitting interior space for a museum and library on the first floor and an assembly room (auditorium) directly above on the second floor.
2. Foundations: This was a building meant to last. Its foundation was sturdy and durable. Broken stones were packed down first, and then covered with slabs of gneiss or bastard granite. The granite was laid on the cement.
3. Walls: Walls were built to be solid with blue gneiss up to the ground level. Blocks of stone covered with pitch and faced internally with brick were then integrated. On this double wall was a heavy course of light, grey granite. Fire proofing was an important consideration

in construction. Walls were layered with slow-burning plastered brick.

Generally, walls were treated in a simple and sober fashion using a uniform sized, rectangular unit of marble on the building's exterior. Avoiding over decoration, its bold, primitive Classical style recalls the French Bibliotheque Saint Genevieve. Ionic capitals are used and repeated, sometimes employed on columns and frequently seen on pillars attached to the fabric of the wall. Pillars with Ionic capitals are sometimes used to frame certain windows. In effect, one begins to enjoy these pillars with Ionic capitals as relief sculptures that project and recess in an ordered, predictable and yet animated fashion, creating a rich sense of textural and visual play. Also punctuating the wall fabric are two rows of full size rectangular windows clearly separated by the Greek Meander which encompasses the entire building. There is also a row of windows at the basement level.

Had finances permitted, large allegorical personages dressed to resemble antique gods would have adorned the front (and perhaps back pediment) pediment. They would have been arranged in precise symmetry, rearticulating the basic character of the edifice. The largest figure was suppose to be a huge, male, centrally located and enthroned. Several smaller personages were meant to flank him while reclining figures would have occupied with lower corners of the pediment much as similar ones did at the Parthenon. Van Brunt also envisioned the names of great historians such as Herodotus, Lysebius, Bancroft and Theuydided (probably meant to read

Thucydides) carved on the band between the cornice and series of second floor windows. On the words, "College of History," were ever carved on this band. This particular words are situated directly below the front pediment on the portico. While much of Van Brunt's intended embellishments did not materialize, sculpture was included above the pediment's 60 foot high apex and flanking its corners. Directly above the apex is a scalloped form, almost Pre-Columbian (broadly Neo-Grec) in mood. At each end related Neo-Grec sculptural forms complement the structure's extremely geometrical character and its sense of austerity. As the most detailed forms on the building, they lend a note of contrast and serve as visual foils of the dominant rectangles and triangles found of The College of History. These "Pre-Columbian" details are, in fact, the only organic forms on the edifice's severely rectilinear facade. They also reveal the kind of sculptural detailing Van Brunt had in mind for certain parts of the building. In general, exterior fenestration remains simple yet its forms are well articulated.

The sides and rear of the structure are equally severe with little embellishment. The Greek Meander, pillars with Ionic capitals and Pre-Columbian detailing are included, giving a finished and unified character to the structure's exterior. There is also a flattened marble rectangle which was once a dedication plaque situated below the rear pediment.

4. Structural system, framing: metal, wood and brick
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Facing The Court of Ceremony is the principle entry of this two storey building. The main set

of double doors (which are not the original oak, but are modern metal framed glass doors) is located in the center of the portico beneath the pediment. To reach these doors, one must proceed up a host of steps passed two true columns and four pillars attached to the exterior wall. The columns (which have Ionic capitals) and pillars are monumental in size and form, extending the full two storeys of the edifice. This entry is quite Neo-Classical in every respect with its flight of stairs, elevating the entry; its grand columns - which are long, clean and culminate in the scrolled forms of Ionic capitals; and its cream white marble which visually and psychologically separate The College of History from its landscape setting. The effect is dignified and awe-inspiring, yet retains a sense of restraint and temperance.

Both sides of the structure have centrally located ground level doors. These doors are also of a recent vintage and are metal framed glass. Directly above the side doors are small triangular "mini-pediments" possessing miniature versions of the large pediments' Pre-Columbian details. There is also a basement, below ground level, door in the rear of the building.

While the main doors and side doors are now in possession of modern metal frame glase members, what appeare to be original oak doors stand approximately one and a half feet behind the ^(fewer ones) toward the edifice's interior.

- b. Windows: There are 35 windows on the front facade; 13 on the second floor, 12 on the first floor and 10 on the basement level. Those on the first and second floors are full sized and rectangular; all ~~seem to be~~ of a more modern vintage and some are equipped with airconditioning units.

All are arranged in perfect symmetry with the second floor's odd or 13th window situated directly above the edifice's main entry. This means five windows are under the porch while four are situated adjacent to the portico, projecting toward The Court of Ceremony. Such an arrangement recalls The White House's front facade. Twenty-four windows (including eight basement ones) are located on the wings, with 12 windows on each respective wing. A clearly articulated ridge with the Greek Meander separates the first and second storeys.

At the ends of both wings, the last set of windows (meaning the last window on the first floor and the window directly above it on the second storey) is given special emphasis. Projecting from the building's wall, the area is treated like two pillars which flank the respective windows. While serving to frame the end windows, these projections work like parenthesis or book ends and unify the entire facade. These protruding ends relate to the projecting portico. In effect, the viewer can more readily sense the whole because of this compositional device, which brings the onlooker back to the central portico in a natural manner. While the edifice remains

clean with clearly demarcated forms, there is a sense of visual layering that is witty and does not allow this otherwise sober structure to become dry.

Each side of the structure has 13 windows (counting the four basement ones) with the odd one placed directly above the central door. The rear which faces Nebraska Avenue has 48 windows: the west wing has 12 windows with four on each floor and the basement level; the east wing has 11 windows with four on each floor and three on the basement level (a door is situated where the fourth door would have been); the library-museum complex has six windows on each of its southward extending sides and 13 windows on its rear with four windows on the basement and first floor and five on the second. Instead of a fifth window, there is a dedicational plaque on the first floor level. All sides of this structure are ruled by absolute symmetry. One finds the same kind of Ionic detailing, treatment of the last set of windows and Pre-Columbian elements of the front facade on all sides of The College of History.

Skylights were incorporated into the original scheme and add still another source of natural light.

6. Roof: The roof was originally made of copper but was later covered with slate. It slants upward.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Early documentation describes the building as a 42 roomed structure. As its exterior shape and forms well articulate, the interior is arranged in perfect symmetry.

The building's interior is spare and functional with Classical detail and well crafted parts. The natural graining of wood was allowed to show, adding a simple yet appropriate kind of ornamentation. Today, the walls within The College of History are painted yellow. This color does not complement or enhance the many original elements still in existence.

Entering the edifice from the principle doors, one is greeted first by a short hall and then a 30 X 30 foot formal entrance room. Perpendicular to the smaller entry hall is a long corridor running the entire length of the structure (east-west). The small entry hall meets the long corridor at right angles, crossing in the middle of the formal entrance room. Directly in front of the entrance hall was the library and museum spaces (which are now laboratories) planned by Van Brunt. Each occupies approximately 26 X 42 feet squared. This portion of the building projects toward Nebraska Avenue. On either side of the library-museum complex are staircases which go to the basement and second floor.

Flanking the entrance hall and library-museum are four suites of three rooms; all of which are arranged in exacting symmetry. Each suite is comprised of a lecture room (27 X 30 feet squared when facing The Court of Ceremony and 20 X 27 when fronting Nebraska Avenue), a seminar room (21 X 21 feet on the side of The Court of Ceremony and 20 X 27 when facing Nebraska Avenue) and a professor's room (14 X 30 when near the mall and 12 X 15 when fronting Nebraska Avenue).

There is a similar arrangement of rooms on the second floor. Instead of a space devoted to a library-museum,

Van Brunt envisioned a 52 X 42 foot assembly room called The Glover Room. This room was designed with proper acoustic^(s) in mind and is now divided into offices.

2. Staircases: On either side of the library-museum, there are staircases which lead to the basement, as well as the second floors. After entering The College of History from either of its two side entrances, one finds staircases which lead to the basement and first floor, but not to the second floor. The west entry and staircase hall is now in possession of a very poor quality mural of a contemporary vintage (probably executed in the last year or two). It serves as a distraction.

The staircases have obviously been altered since Van Brunt finished the project in 1898. Modern tiles are on their floors. Most of the staircases are comprised of metal painted black.

3. Floorings: The Floors on the main level are marble. Those within the staircases and on the ground floor are tile.
4. Walls and ceilings: Walls are tooled in Tennessee marble and quartered oak. In fact, many walls are divided between a marble and quartered oak finish. As the Courier indicates the quartered oak was considered among Washington's finest. Other rooms and corridors are finished in Georgia pine. The lavatories are said to be walled with white glazed brick. Most of the walls are painted yellow.

The ceilings are high and have quartered oak girders. The high ceilings combined with the large windows give each room a spacious light-filled quality, as well as a monumental dignity.

5. Doorways and doors: Most of the doors seem to be the original glazed oak. Some doors have been replaced with modern metal framed glass members. Many modern doors have been added where partitions have been erected to create many rooms out of what was once only one or two.
6. Hardware: Early accounts indicate that the structure was meant to be heated from an outside power house, but space was provided for a future furnace and boiler. Heating was to be by steam; light was to be by both gas and electricity. Documentament reveals that the latest in both was installed. Electrical wires were enclosed in tubes to insure safety. Modern plumbing was also included.

Naturally, the building now has more modern elements. It also has a fire escape in its rear.

Prepared by: Karin M.E. Alexia, Art and Architectural Historian;
Teacher, Northern Virginia Community College and
Southeastern University;
Doctoral Student, The University of Virginia;
1981;

C. Sources of Information: The preceding is based on research executed in Washington, D.C. (The American University, The Library of Congress, The National Archives), Brookline, Massachusetts (Olmsted's Studio) and Chicago, Illinois (The University of Chicago, The Burnham Library, The Newberry Library).

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Prepared by: Karin M.E. Alexis, Art and Architectural Histori
Teacher, Northern Virginia Community College and
Southeastern University;
Doctoral Student, The University of Virginia;
1981;